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Implementation of recommendations on the six mandated areas of the Forum and on the Millennium Development Goals

Information received from the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations

United Nations Children's Fund

Summary

The present report contains information on the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in response to the recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. UNICEF has been making efforts to implement specific programmes aimed at indigenous children, at the country and local levels in particular, while other initiatives are being conducted at the subregional level. The work of UNICEF has focused on indigenous children while implementing holistic and comprehensive perspectives of indigenous peoples' world views. Culturally sensitive approaches have therefore been an important methodology for the Fund. The present report also contains information in relation to indigenous children, including birth registration and malnutrition. UNICEF is also very active in inter-agency coordination work to integrate and mainstream indigenous issues at the operational level of the United Nations system.

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I. Response to recommendations addressed to the United Nations Children's Fund

Country-specific analyses of the situation of indigenous children

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has made specific efforts over the past year to conduct participatory studies in several countries on the situation of indigenous children. The studies were aimed at gathering quantitative and qualitative data to shed light on the disparities and widespread discrimination endured by indigenous children. The data have been used by UNICEF as advocacy tools to make the situation of indigenous children visible, with a view to influencing public policies to address that discrimination. In Ecuador for example, UNICEF supports a national publication on the state of children and adolescents. Indigenous children are able to use the publication to express and raise awareness of their situation through a separate plea filed with the Ombudsman for the rights of indigenous peoples. In El Salvador, UNICEF used a rights-based approach to conduct a study on the situation of indigenous peoples, which highlighted that this group lacks representation on the country's agenda.

2. UNICEF also conducts studies at the community level. In Chile, for example, UNICEF supported an opinion study with Mapuche children and adolescents from Santiago and localities of the ninth region. The results were communicated to the media during a seminar on the protection of the rights of Mapuche children and adolescents. In the Philippines, over the past year UNICEF completed a participatory community appraisal of eight indigenous Kabihug communities in the Camarines Norte, with the extensive participation of indigenous youth as part of the research team. In accordance with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, and with a view to securing a second round of free, prior and informed consent of the communities prior to printing, publication of the study has been postponed. The study prompted a national rapid assessment of the situation of indigenous children and women throughout the country. Among other findings, the study found that Kabihug children are almost completely uneducated, with only 12 per cent of them enrolled in primary school. Births are almost universally unregistered, and Kabihug families are routinely forced to abandon their homes and move off the plantations on which they work. The study has played a critical role in helping UNICEF to raise awareness of the extreme disadvantage experienced by indigenous children who, for the most part, remain invisible in public policies.

3. UNICEF also supports visits of government officials to indigenous areas with a view to sensitizing them to the situation of indigenous children. In Malaysia, for example, in 2006 UNICEF supported a number of study tours with senior delegations from designated ministries to remote communities in Sabah and Sarawak. The tours fostered greater collaboration and ownership of projects with those communities.

Bilingual and intercultural education projects

4. Over the past year, UNICEF has continued to support bilingual and intercultural education. New projects were initiated in several countries, while in countries where bilingual and intercultural education were under way, efforts were made to review methodologies and strengthen their effectiveness.

5. In Belize, for example, UNICEF supported the first ever intercultural education symposium, which helped raise awareness and trigger debate regarding the challenges and disparities faced by indigenous children and adolescents. The meeting involved policymakers, government officials, educators, young people and community representatives, and focused on the promotion of cultural diversity as an essential component to building social cohesion, inclusion and fostering the principle of non-discrimination in schools and in the wider society. As a result, and thanks to the commitment of indigenous leaders, a plan of action was drafted that will lead to curriculum reform, teacher training and implementation of intercultural education in all schools. An interdisciplinary committee composed of a wide range of partners was created to provide technical direction to this initiative.

6. In some countries where intercultural and bilingual education has been supported for many years, UNICEF continues to refine tools and approaches to ensure quality education for indigenous children. In Malaysia, UNICEF supported training for teachers and school administrators on special approaches towards Orang Asli children which focuses on an inclusive learning environment, tailored grading systems and strengthened parenting skills. Remote education initiatives have been highly recognized and will be further expanded. In Guatemala, the Fund provided technical assistance for the improvement of the bilingual and intercultural education system. The model for that system was pedagogically improved by the inclusion of new components that promote active learning, the development of skills in all areas, greater cultural relevance and gender equality and equity. In Peru, UNICEF contributed to strengthening the production of culturally pertinent educational material in indigenous languages as well as the reprinting and writing of new texts, such as leisure reading and song books in indigenous languages, that were developed with the participation of teachers and children.

7. In several countries, UNICEF has concentrated on promoting indigenous cultures through education. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, efforts were focused on reviving the Wayuu language, with teachers trained to teach in their mother tongue and use educational software, while 600 Añu children participated in the revival of their language with the support of community promoters. In the same country, UNICEF supported a fluvial network of libraries with the participation of teachers, children and families. In Brazil, UNICEF mobilized children and adolescents in the Amazon region to reflect on their ethnic and cultural identity through an initiative entitled "Mapping our Culture". Yet, intercultural education benefits not only indigenous children. In Mexico, UNICEF continued to support a project to raise awareness of and combat discrimination against indigenous children through the development and integration into the school curriculum of materials that describe the situation, culture and traditions of indigenous children in Mexico.

8. At the regional level, UNICEF also supported the Latin American Congress on Intercultural and Bilingual Education that was held in Bolivia and facilitated the participation of indigenous representatives from several countries.

Culturally sensitive health care

9. UNICEF continues to promote culturally sensitive health care. In Ecuador, UNICEF entered into an agreement with other partners to ensure that indigenous mothers and children are systematically protected in their right to safe delivery and

childbirth in line with their cultural traditions. Under the agreement, and within the framework of the Minimum Agenda for Indigenous Children and Adolescents, pregnant women are free to choose the type of childbirth they wish. In Peru, the Fund supported the reinforcement of access to maternity services for mothers in rural communities by adapting the practices used at health centres to the cultural patterns of the country's indigenous peoples.

10. In the area of reproductive health, increased attention was given to addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS in indigenous communities. In Venezuela, UNICEF supported the training of health-care staff and municipal committees to promote the prevention of HIV in indigenous communities.

Indigenous women and girls

11. In line with its mission statement, UNICEF works to promote the rights of indigenous women and girls. As evidenced in its publication *State of the World's Children 2007: Executive Summary*, UNICEF believes that gender equality benefits women and children and has a tremendous positive impact on the development of society as a whole. In Guatemala, UNICEF has supported the strengthening of a municipal system of scholarship for indigenous girls from some of the poorest municipalities of the country. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNICEF strengthened and promoted a strategy for the care for women victims of violence in Zulia through the publication of awareness-raising material. In Bolivia, a gender-sensitive literacy programme for rural women's councils is being supported to help indigenous women leaders not only know how to read and write but also have more influence on municipal councils regarding legal and administrative procedures. In Colombia, in 2006, UNICEF provided technical assistance to local indigenous women's organizations in the department of Narino to include a gender focus into the strengthening of youth organizations. A total of 650 men and women were thereby engaged in a collective reflection on gender equity, which had a positive impact in reducing violence and increasing indigenous women's participation in managing local organizations.

II. Response to recommendations addressed to the United Nations system in general

12. UNICEF is working jointly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) towards the elaboration of a study with the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru.

13. A joint initiative is under way with the Pan-American Health Organization to organize a traditional healers workshop on HIV/AIDS in 2007.

III. Obstacles to implementation of recommendations of the Permanent Forum

14. UNICEF welcomes the recommendations made by the Permanent Forum and is committed to working towards their implementation in line with its mission

statement. Since recommendations are often numerous, it is the Fund's understanding that they will be realized in a progressive manner by building on opportunities.

15. With its medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2009, UNICEF is using the human rights-based approach to go beyond support to specific projects and adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach that focuses on tackling the root causes of discrimination against and exclusion of indigenous children through public policies. For that reason, UNICEF encourages the indigenous organizations with which it operates to work together through alliances. Such cooperation allows for a better use of resources in larger scale projects that benefit more people than a number of small projects — unless there is a specific reason to act at a small-scale level, such as fighting an epidemic threatening a small group or the disappearance of an indigenous language.

16. Another challenge in the Fund's work with indigenous peoples lies in ongoing political sensitivities around the issue, which affects advocacy efforts. In some countries, the publication of data on the situation of indigenous peoples continues to be highly sensitive.

IV. Other significant information regarding recent policies, programmes, budgetary allocations or activities regarding indigenous issues

General developments

17. As it has in the past, UNICEF has been actively participating in inter-agency efforts aimed at promoting indigenous issues. Specifically, in 2007, the Fund is acting as the co-chair of the task team established for the implementation of the decision by the United Nations Development Group to mainstream and integrate indigenous issues in the operational work of the United Nations system.

18. In line with the Permanent Forum's statements, UNICEF believes that the focus efforts aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals should be redefined, taking in consideration the perspectives, experience and world view of indigenous people. In that regard, the UNICEF Americas and Caribbean Regional Office discussed its medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2009 as the Fund's contribution to the Millennium Development Goals with indigenous leaders, who shared their views and orientation regarding the specific key result areas for indigenous children. One of the decisions adopted at the UNICEF Consultative Group of indigenous leaders was to publish those views in a document in 2007.

19. In 2007, the same regional office is planning to develop a regional communication campaign that celebrates the cultural diversity of the Americas.

V. Other areas of programmes of the United Nations Children's Fund that are relevant to indigenous peoples

Malnutrition

20. Indigenous children suffer from malnutrition and low birth weight in several countries. UNICEF is very active throughout the Latin American region in addressing malnutrition among indigenous children, especially young children. In Paraguay, a nutritional survey in two indigenous communities showed a very high prevalence of underweight and stunted growth among children under five years of age. The delivery of nutritional supplements led to a 70 per cent reduction in the underweight prevalence. In parallel, a number of actions were carried out, such as training the personnel of local health-care centres, for the detection and care of cases of malnutrition, the elaboration of a system of nutritional surveillance of children, the provision of supplements as well as nutritional education to the families. The experience conducted with the two indigenous communities led to the expansion throughout the whole country of a nutritional programme for children under five years of age and underweight pregnant women. In Panama, a nutrition study in indigenous communities has been undertaken and will be used to promote inclusive social policies.

Birth registration

21. Birth registration is a child right, the realization of which is essential to the fulfilment of other rights. However, registrars are often not easily accessible to indigenous peoples because they are located far from the community, imply a complex procedure, are not culturally sensitive and involve user fees. UNICEF has made significant efforts to promote birth registration in indigenous areas. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNICEF promoted the establishment of civil registry hospital units, leading to birth registration rates of 92 per cent in the Amazonas and 86 per cent in Zulia, two regions with a high indigenous population. In Ecuador, the campaign entitled "Together for Identity" is a registration project that enabled more than 6,000 children in the province of Morona to be given identity documents. Part of the registration strategy for remote areas of the borders involves the establishment of a registration brigade in the river health unit, which was provided with computer equipment. The brigade will be instrumental in enabling inhabitants of the riverbanks to gain access to registration services in the future. In Nicaragua, UNICEF promotes birth registration through the commitment of mayors, civil registrars and indigenous community leaders in alliance with traditional authorities, teachers, the local media and parents. An important innovation was the pre-registration carried out by community registrars, with the subsequent entry of the details at official birth registration centres.

VI. Information and suggestions regarding the special theme of the sixth session, "Territories, lands and natural resources"

22. UNICEF believes that children's rights can be best realized in an environment where children can grow and develop happily and where their families and communities have the capacity to protect their rights and provide for their needs. Land is an essential spiritual and economic element to indigenous communities, and

deprivation thereof affects the integrity of the community, which in turn has an impact on children's ability to develop harmoniously within their communities. In this context, UNICEF calls on all actors to prevent disruptions in indigenous peoples' ways of living and ensure in all circumstances a protective environment for their children.

VII. Information regarding the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

23. UNICEF is committed to achieving the objectives of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and welcomes the Permanent Forum's useful guidance on priorities in this regard.

VIII. Inputs towards a questionnaire on programmes

24. Two countries in South-East Asia have programmes directly related to indigenous peoples, while 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented and included in their annual reports activities directly related to indigenous peoples.

25. At the regional and subregional levels, UNICEF has conducted the following programmes:

(a) Programme for the rights of indigenous children and adolescents (17 countries);

(b) Subregional programme "Proandes" with a focus on education, health and protection (Andean countries);

(c) Subregional programme Amazonico (Amazon countries and Paraguay);

(d) Subregional programme for intercultural and bilingual education (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru);

(e) Bilateral programme in Ecuador and Peru with indigenous groups in the border area focused on health.